

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY LONDON

S E C R E T BEIRUT 1917

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR PBOR LE
SUBJECT: SOUTH LEBANON: CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT CHAMOUN

1. CALLED ON PRESIDENT CHAMOUN 1200 LOCAL APRIL 5 TO DISCUSS
SOUTH LEBANON. TOLD HIM THAT A PRINCIPAL PURPOSE OF
RESOLUTIONS 425 AND 426 WAS TO HELP REESTABLISH AUTHORITY OF
LEBANESE GOVERNMENT IN SOUTH. THAT AUTHORITY WAS NOT GOING
TO BE ESTABLISHED UNLESS LEBANESE WERE PREPARED TO SEND TROOPS.
FURTHERMORE, DELAY IN SENDING TROOPS WAS GOING TO CAUSE
PROBLEMS WITH CONTRIBUTORS, PARTICULARLY IF SOVIETS CHOSE TO
SNIPE AT UNIFIL IN SECURITY COUNCIL. I NOTED THAT HE HAD
MADE RECENT DECLARATION CALLING FOR NEW MEETING OF SECURITY
COUNCIL TO ARRANGE FOR ENLARGED UNIFIL, WHICH WOULD
DEAL WITH OVERALL PROBLEM OF PALESTINIAN PRESENCE IN
LEBANON. THERE WOULD IN FACT PROBABLY BE ANOTHER

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SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING ON SUBJECT OF UNIFIL BECAUSE UN
SECRETARIAT FELT FORCE HAD TO BE EXPANDED IN SIZE. IT
WAS NOT GOING TO BE SIMPLE TASK, HOWEVER, TO GET UNANIMOUS
AGREEMENT JUST ON ENLARGEMENT, AND IT WAS IMPORTANT THAT HE
KEEP IN MIND DELICATE NATURE OF ENTIRE PROCESS. CHANGING
OF MANDATE WAS NOT REALISTIC IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES.

2. SAID I UNDERSTOOD CONCERNS OF PRESIDENT SARKIS AND OTHERS ABOUT SENDING FORCES TO THE SOUTH AT THIS TIME. THERE WERE OBVIOUSLY DANGERS WHICH WOULD BE ENCOUNTERED. THESE WERE RISKS WHICH WOULD HAVE TO BE TAKEN, HOWEVER. LEBANESE COULD NOT EXPECT UN FORCES TO TAKE RISKS UNLESS LEBANESE ARMY WAS SHARING THEM.

3. CHAMOUN SAID HE HAD NO OBJECTION TO SENDING FORCES TO SOUTH AND HE UNDERSTOOD VERY WELL WHAT I WAS SAYING. LEBANESE, HOWEVER, HAD TO THINK OF THEIR PRIORITIES. AS A RESULT OF ISRAELI INVASION AND UN ACTIONS, LEBANON WAS NOW FACED WITH PRESENCE ESTIMATED 15,000 ARMED PALESTINIANS IN AREA BETWEEN ZAHRANI AND LITANI. THESE PEOPLE POSED IMMEDIATE DANGER TO BEIRUT. WHILE SOUTH LEBANON WAS PART OF LEBANESE TERRITORY AND IT WAS IMPORTANT THAT LEBANESE SOVEREIGNTY BE REASSERTED THERE, IT WAS EVEN MORE IMPORTANT THAT LEBANESE BE ABLE PROTECT CENTRAL LEBANON AGAINST PALESTINIANS. THEY COULD NOT AFFORD TO DENUDE THAT AREA OF TROOPS JUST TO ASSERT SOVEREIGNTY OVER LEBANON.

4. IN THE INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE, CHAMOUN CONTINUED, REASSERTION OF LEBANESE CONTROL OVER SOUTHERN LEBANON MIGHT BE IMPORTANT FOR PEACE. AS FAR AS LEBANESE WERE CONCERNED, HOWEVER, IT MADE LITTLE DIFFERENCE WHETHER ISRAELIS STAYED THERE FOR ANOTHER SIX MONTHS OR EVEN
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LONGER. THAT MIGHT JEOPARDIZE CHANCES OF NEGOTIATING SETTLEMENT BETWEEN ISRAEL AND EGYPT, BUT IT WAS NOT GOING TO HAVE ALL THAT MUCH EFFECT ON SECURITY OF LEBANESE. SOUTH LEBANON WAS THEREFORE A LOWER PRIORITY THAN CENTRAL LEBANON.

5. I ASKED IF HE REALLY THOUGHT LEBANESE ARMY WAS PROTECTING LEBANESE IN BEIRUT AREA. CHAMOUN HESITATED AND
THEN SAID HE THOUGHT THEY CONTRIBUTED TO THAT SECURITY.

6. I SAID WE WERE VERY MUCH AWARE OF PROBLEM POSED BY PRESENCE OF PALESTINIANS BETWEEN ZAHRANI AND LITANI. WE DID NOT HAVE IMMEDIATE SOLUTION FOR THAT PROBLEM, BUT I THOUGHT ONLY FORCE ABLE TO CONTROL THAT AREA WAS SYRIAN ARMY, AND IT WOULD NOT MOVE IN UNTIL THERE WAS ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL. ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL WOULD DEPEND IN PART ON LEBANESE ABILITY TO MANIFEST A PRESENCE IN SOUTH LEBANON. SECURITY OF CENTRAL LEBANON WAS PROVIDED BY SYRIANS, NOT BY LEBANESE ARMY. CERTAIN UNITS OF THAT ARMY COULD BE SENT TO SOUTH WITHOUT AFFECTING SECURITY OF BEIRUT. IF THEY WERE ABLE ENTER AREA IN COMPANY WITH

UN FORCES, THIS WOULD GIVE THEM ADDED SECURITY.

7. CHAMOUN SAID LEBANESE ARMY NOT WELL ENOUGH EQUIPPED FOR TASK. IT HAD NO ARTILLERY, FOR INSTANCE, AND HE DID NOT THINK IT SHOULD GO TO SOUTH UNTIL IT WAS PROPERLY EQUIPPED. I SAID IF WE WAITED FOR LEBANESE ARMY TO BE FULLY EQUIPPED, IT WOULD BE MATTER OF YEAR OR YEAR AND A HALF BEFORE THEY WENT TO SOUTH, BY WHICH TIME SITUATION WOULD HAVE DETERIORATED FURTHER. I HAD TOLD HIM A YEAR AGO THAT THERE WOULD BE NO IMPLEMENTATION OF CAIRO ACCORDS UNTIL LEBANESE HAD THEIR OWN ARMY. PROBLEM WAS ONE OF MEN NOT OF EQUIPMENT. WE WERE PROVIDING EQUIPMENT AT A MODERATE RATE BECAUSE OF OUR ESTIMATE THAT THAT WAS ALL THE LEBANESE WERE ABLE TO
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ABSORB. GENERAL KHOURY HAD EQUIPMENT HE WAS UNABLE TO DISTRIBUTE BECAUSE HE HAD NO RELIABLE UNITS. IN ANY EVENT, I WAS NOT QUALIFIED TO COMMENT ON NEED FOR ARTILLERY OR OTHER ITEMS, BUT WE HAD MILITARY TEAM HERE AT THE MOMENT THAT WAS STUDYING THESE VERY QUESTIONS.

8. CHAMOUN SAID HE DID NOT LIKE BEING TREATED AS A POOR RELATION AND HE HOPED MILITARY SURVEY TEAM WOULD RECOMMEND AUGMENTATION OF ASSISTANCE TO LEBANON. I SAID TEAM'S MANDATE WAS VERY NARROW. IT WAS TO MAKE RECOMMENDATION FOR UTILIZATIN OF \$50 MILLION IN FMS CREDITS FOR CURRENT FISCAL YEAR. I FELT SURE IT WOULD TAKE LEBANESE ARMY SOME TIME TO ABSORB \$50 MILLION. IF LEBANESE HAD THE UNITS, HOWEVER, AND HAD THE MEN AND WE WERE CONFIDENT OF THEIR ABILITY TO USE MORE EQUIPMENT, I WAS CONFIDENT WE COULD GET MORE, SOMEHOW. FIRST REQUIREMENT, HOWEVER, WAS ACT OF POLITICAL WILL WHICH WOULD GET ARMY MOVING.

9. CHAMOUN ADMITTED THAT ARMY HAD NOT MOVED AS FAST AS IT MIGHT AND MUMBLED SOMETHING ABOUT GENERAL KHOURY. HE THEN EXHORTED ME AGAIN TO TELL THE MILITARY TEAM TO GIVE THE LEBANESE ARMY LOTS OF MODERN EQUIPMENT.

10. COMMENT:. IT IS INCREASINGLY CLEAR THAT CHAMOUN IS EXERCISING POWERFUL INHIBITING INFLUENCE ON SARKIS. ALTHOUGH I HAD SUSPECTED THAT DEFENSE OF CENTRAL LEBANON WAS A FACTOR IN SARKIS' HESITATION, THIS IS THE FIRST TIME IT HAS BEEN EXPRESSED TO ME IN SUCH CATEGORIC TERMS. CHAMOUN WILL HAVE TO BE BROUGHT AROUND SOMEHOW, OR SARKIS WILL NOT ACT BEYOND SENDING SYMBOLIC FORCES TO SOUTH. REPORT OF SURVEY TEAM MAY BE USEFUL TO US IN THIS RESPECT.

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